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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were: (1) to ascertain the extent to which urban school systems have decentralized the administration of their schools, (2) to obtain opinions on its workability in terms of curriculum development, (3) to begin development of an instrument for clarifying role and function issues at various echelons of decision-making, (4) to analyze and contrast avowed purposes of decentralization with actual results in terms of moving decision-making closer to the levels affected, (5) to obtain information to help understand more about the change mechanisms now utilized in urban school systems. A mail survey of some 50 of the nation's largest school districts was made. It was found that the trend toward administrative decentralization has accelerated during the past five years. Only New York and Detroit have adopted a community control organization model having regional school boards with policy-making and resource allocation authority. Most urban curriculum leaders felt there was much need for curriculum specialists. There was evidence that accountability for curriculum improvement may not have been substantially strengthened. A strong leadership role on the part of regional office personnel has not yet emerged. Considerable effort has been made to obtain citizen participation at the building level. (Author/JM)

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URBAN SCHOOL DECENTRALIZATION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

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For many years now urban schools have been under frequent attack by "romantic critics," special interest groups, citizens, and students. During several years of social protest, students and parents were often demanding a larger voice in decisions affecting education in their communities. At the same time, there was an increasing contention that large bureaucratic organizations in the big cities were not responsive to logistical or instructional problems in individual schools.

The institutional response to these issues of citizen participation and logistical responsiveness was often administrative decentralization. Regional offices were usually established with a line officer, designated as Area or Assistant Superintendents, in charge of a small staff of curriculum specialists and other professionals. This new level of administrative organization between the central office and building level often came into being with minimum guidance as to its role or function.

Although there have been several studies to ascertain the extent or nature of the administrative structures that were evolving, or to analyze the impact of citizen participation, only very limited work has been done to determine the impact of decentralization on curriculum development strategies.

Curriculum development, in the context of this study, is broadly defined as including such activities as needs assessment and goal setting, selecting and organizing learning materials and teaching methods, and evaluation. Staff development activities are very much a part of this process.

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This study is intended as an initial probing of this one aspect of decentralization - its impact on curriculum development. Respondents were central office curriculum leaders and no attempt was made to validate their judgment at other levels of the organization. In addition, no attempt was made to contribute to the literature on the efficacy of citizen participation in the governance of public education.

Purposes of Study: (1) to ascertain the extent to which urban school systems have decentralized the administration of their schools, (2) to obtain opinions on its workability in terms of curriculum development, (3) to begin development of an instrument for clarifying role and function issues at various echelons of decision-making, (4) to analyze and contrast avowed purposes of decentralization with actual results in terms of moving decision-making closer to the levels affected, (5) to obtain information to help understand more about the change mechanisms now utilized in urban school systems.

Data Source: Mail survey of some 50 of the nation's largest school districts (generally those in cities with populations in excess of 250,000). Respondents were Assistant or Associate Superintendents for Instruction. Some data included in describing the types of decentralization were taken from an earlier study by Allan Ornstein.*

RESULTS

Nature of Administrative Organizations Reported

	City	Enrollment	Schools	Area-Region Districts	Year
A. Decentralization with regional offices and regional "school boards" with policy making authority. -(2)	New York City	1,196,000	960	32D	69
	Detroit	240,000	320	08	71
B. Decentralization with regional office and regional committee acting in advisory capacity (appointed by the central board or chosen through a mechanism set by the board). -(2)	Portland	69,500		3A	70
	Chicago	590,000		5A-27D	69

* Ornstein, Allan C., "Administrative/Community Organization of Metropolitan Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, (June, 1971), pp. 448-478.

	City	Enrollment	Schools	Area/Region Districts	Year
I. Decentralization with regional offices but not having regional "school boards." (21)	Philadelphia	276,000	310	10	*
	New Orleans	96,719	135	10	54
	Atlanta	66,500	144	15	54
	Dade Co.	240,000		26	45
	Nashville	85,000		21	64
	Indianapolis	92,000		10,11A	69
	San Antonio	73,000		5A	69
	Pittsburgh	70,000		10	69
	Seattle	49,021		10	69
	St. Louis	81,000	145	10	70
	Los Angeles	727,641	542	42,12A	71
	Houston	213,000	225	6A	71
	Oakland	56,000	91	3A	71
	Memphis	119,115		8A	71
	San Francisco	76,000		7 Zones	71
	El Paso	42,600		3A	72
	Greenville	67,000	96	5A	72
	Minneapolis	59,000	86	3A	73
	Cincinnati	75,000		8 at 5/2 sec.207	
	Baltimore	164,000	250	9A	73
	Washington	130,000		4A	74

* many years ago

II. Decentralization but not reporting area or regional offices or "school boards." (1)	Louisville	84,471	87	8A	70

No. adopting prior to 1965 - 3
No. adopting 1965 - 1964 - 0
No. adopting 1965 - 1969 - 7
No. adopting 1970 - 1974 - 16

I. Districts reporting not to have regional, area or district offices or school boards. (20)	Atlanta, Denver, Columbus, San Diego, Jacksonville, Toledo, Tucson, Long Beach, Charlotte-Mecklenberg, Norfolk, Phoenix, Boston, Fort Worth, Tulsa, Omaha, Oklahoma City, Kansas City, Cleveland. (Dallas has regional service offices for elementary schools; Milwaukee has a "cluster" plan.)

Twenty-six of the 46 districts included in this study (57%) reported they were administratively decentralized and 20 reported they were not. Although some districts reported regional or area intermediate units for attendance or service purposes, they were not classified as decentralized in a regional sense if they did not have a line officer such as an Area or Assistant Superintendent in that office. Fifteen of the 26 decentralized districts have made the change in the last five years.

Availability of Curricular Specialists

About half the responses from decentralized school systems reported fewer curricular specialists and more assistants than before decentralization. Three reported no change in the number of specialists available and two indicated more were available. Several comments indicated that as more curriculum improvement activities were undertaken, there was a recognition of greater need for specialists and that principals rarely had time to perform this function.

Responsibility for Initiating New Instructional Programs

The most common response, was that this was a joint responsibility. That is, initiatives could come from either the building level, regional office or central office. There was a slight tendency to respond that the initiative normally came from regional or central office persons.

Purposes of Decentralization

"Responsiveness" was the concept which appeared most often when the respondents were asked about the purposes of decentralization in their city. In classifying these responses, the purposes were grouped into four categories and they produced no surprises insofar as the literature on decentralization is concerned.

1. To promote community involvement - help have the program at the committee's needs, provide for community participation.

2. To promote administrative effectiveness - reduce size of administrative unit, move decision-making closer to implementation site, respond to want for social services, improve planning and problem solving ability at local school level, etc.

3. To promote administrative efficiency - reduce overlap of services, engage schools in priority setting and resource allocation, and encourage program initiation.

4. To provide for greater curricular and instructional improvement - greater responsiveness to student needs, provide interdisciplinary and inter-level coordination, improve K-12 articulation, improve instructional quality, increase teacher participation in curricular development, and respond to needs of a particular geographic area.

Because all decentralized systems did not provide data on their purposes and since it was difficult to parse priorities for any of these purposes, no attempt was made to quantify or rate these responses in importance.

No rationale or policy statement was located that came to grips with the problem of a "standardized" instructional program and variations issued to dealing with autonomous regions or buildings.

Judging from the data reported elsewhere in the study, and from earlier research, it would appear that considerable refinement and improvement is needed before these decentralized organizations can be said to be fulfilling the purposes expressed for them. On the other hand, if a sense of participation or "ownership" in the school system can be demonstrated (not a part of this study), that alone may well justify having adopted the decentralized administrative structures.

[illegible]

The data below are the responses of patients from 27 cities regarding his or her preferred [illegible]. The cautions under each of these categories indicate whether the male and female influence matches with regards to several different issues.

[illegible]	[illegible]	Male influence (%)	Same influence (%)	Lower influence (%)	[illegible]
1. [illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
a. [illegible]	[illegible]	51	3	3	[illegible]
b. [illegible]	[illegible]	8	4	3	[illegible]
c. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	8	8	[illegible]
d. [illegible]					
2. [illegible]	[illegible]	8	3	3	[illegible]
a. [illegible]	[illegible]	4	3	3	[illegible]
b. [illegible]	[illegible]	43	3	3	[illegible]
c. [illegible]					
d. [illegible]					
3. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	3	3	[illegible]
a. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	3	3	[illegible]
b. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	4	3	
c. [illegible]					
d. [illegible]					
4. [illegible]	[illegible]	53	3	3	[illegible]
a. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	4	3	[illegible]
b. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	8	3	
c. [illegible]					
d. [illegible]					
5. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	3	3	[illegible]
a. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	3	3	[illegible]
	[illegible]	3	8	43	
6. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	3	3	[illegible]
a. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	3	3	[illegible]
b. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	3	3	
c. [illegible]					
d. [illegible]					
7. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	3	3	[illegible]
a. [illegible]	[illegible]	23	3	3	[illegible]
b. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	3	3	
c. [illegible]					
d. [illegible]					
8. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	3	3	[illegible]
a. [illegible]	[illegible]	3	43	3	[illegible]
b. [illegible]	[illegible]	53	3	3	
c. [illegible]					
d. [illegible]					

Level of Cost	Location	Most Influence (%)	Some Influence (%)	Least Influence (%)	Training
5. Construction activities (work and objectives for a certain school).	Central Regional Building	1 1 98	2 4 2	72 4 2	Most building Least central office
10. Location a site for construction or addition to the community or the school in general or individual school in meeting the goals.	Central Regional Building	3 3 3	2 4 2	72 4 2	Most building Least central office

Central Office

Most Influence	Least Influence
1. Teacher assignment 2. Hiring 3. Promotion 4. principal selection 5. Building specification	1. Selecting reading materials 2. Extracurricular staffing 3. Other school teaching programs 4. Building work and objectives 10. Appointing to projects

Regional

Most Influence	Least Influence
1. School extracurricular staffing	

Building

Most Influence	Least Influence
1. Selecting area reading materials 2. Other activities school staffing 4. Building work and objectives 10. Appointing to projects	1. Teacher assignment 2. Hiring (supervision) 3. Promotion decisions 4. principal selection 5. Building specification

It will appear that there has been only a very limited shifting of decision-making authority to central offices. Further study is needed to see exactly how it changes, and to estimate the central office leaders' real control over curriculum. An evaluation of how much real authority has been shifted to the central staff. These findings would tend to confirm both impressions and discussions of the kinds of activities centralizing which has come with the growth of city school systems.

Leadership Function in Regional Offices

Curriculum and Instruction Leadership in Administration	Rank	Rank
	10.1	10 - Selecting school textbooks 10 - Selecting pupil textbooks 10 - Promotion, school 10 - Pupil Textbooks 10 - In textbooks

Regional offices were rated higher in terms of their leadership contributions in curriculum in administrative matters than they were in curriculum and instruction matters.